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# Argumentation Meets Adapted Cognition: Manipulation in Media Discourse on Immigration

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## Abstract

Critical discourse analysis has focussed extensively on argumentation in anti-immigration discourse where a specific suite of argumentation strategies has been identified as constitutive of the discourse. The successful perlocutionary effects of these arguments are analysed as products of pragmatic processes based on 'common-sense' reasoning schemes known as *topoi*. In this paper, I offer an alternative explanation grounded in cognitive-evolutionary psychology. Specifically, it is shown that a number of argumentation schemes identified as recurrent in anti-immigration discourse relate to two cognitive mechanisms proposed in evolutionary psychology: the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism (Cosmides 1989) and epistemic vigilance (Sperber et al. 2010). It is further suggested that the potential perlocutionary effects of argument acts in anti-immigration discourse, in achieving sanction for discriminatory practices, may arise not as the product of intentional-inferential processes but as a function of cognitive heuristics and biases provided by these mechanisms. The impact of such arguments may therefore be best characterised in terms of manipulation rather than persuasion.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, argumentation, manipulation, heuristics, biases, immigration, media, cheater detection and avoidance, epistemic vigilance

## 1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to situate Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with respect to recent research in evolutionary psychology (cf. Chilton 2005; O'Halloran 2005; Hart 2010, 2011). Specifically, I offer an alternative explanation for the legitimising effects of argument acts recurrent in media discourse on immigration which suggests that these acts may be successful in reproducing anti-immigration attitudes as a function of evolved heuristics and biases in social cognition. This is an important step forward for CDA where, according to Chilton, an evolutionary perspective can "provide an explanatory framework for expanding the discussion of issues that CDA is concerned with" (2005: 24). Chilton (2005), in fact,

explicitly calls for CDA to consider the contributions that evolutionary psychology can make at the explanation stage. He notes that, in order to fully understand the discursive construction of national identity, racism, xenophobia etc., leading to discriminatory social practices, we need to pay closer attention to *why* discriminatory discourse is so effective. And this, he suggests, means “taking an explanatory stance rather than a merely descriptive one” and “taking account of ideas developed in cognitive and evolutionary psychology” (p. 24). These proposals, though, are yet to receive significant uptake in CDA where, as O’Halloran observes, “CDA is theoretically eclectic but absent from its theoretical sources is biologically-based explanation” (2005: 1945).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, despite the potential efficacy of evolutionary psychology for CDA, Wodak (2006), for example, chooses to ignore the cognitive and evolutionary dimensions of discrimination because “no convincing arguments ... have yet been brought to light” (2006: 187). Yet, there is a significant literature in evolutionary psychology on the (mal)adaptive nature of discrimination and its cognitive underpinnings (e.g. Hirschfeld 1994; Sperber 1994; Schaller et al. 2003; Schaller and Neuberg 2008).

In this paper, then, I seek to connect argumentation in discriminatory discourse with discriminatory social practices via adapted cognition. This is neither a pessimistic nor a deterministic position, as will be made clear in section 3. Rather, understanding why we are so quick to form discriminatory judgements based on information acquired in discourse offers a further level of critical awareness and thus means of resistance. In Section 2, I outline the standard take on argumentation in the domain of immigration as presented predominantly in the discourse-historical approach to CDA. In Section 3, I highlight recent, relevant research on cognitive heuristics and the pragmatics of manipulation. In Section 4, I provide an evolutionary perspective on the impact of specific argument acts discussed elsewhere in CDA under the rubric of topoi and fallacies.

## **2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Argumentation**

Argumentation analysis forms part of both the discourse-historical and the socio-cognitive approaches to CDA (e.g. Reisigl and Wodak 2001; van Dijk 2000a/b; van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; Wodak 2001; Wodak and Sedlak 2000). Especially in the discourse-historical approach, analysis is conducted against the theoretical background of pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992) and in particular the notions of fallacy (e.g. Woods 1992) and topos (e.g. Kienpointner and Kindt 1994). Whilst CDA is influenced by pragma-dialectics, then, the former is concerned with the strategic effects of argument acts from a critical standpoint rather than with the effectiveness of argumentation from a normative perspective based on an idealised model of the discourse activity (see Ihnen and Richardson

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<sup>1</sup> Though see discussion in focus issue of *Discourse Studies* 13 (6).

2011). In the discourse-historical approach to CDA, argumentation is one of five discursive 'strategies' involved in positive-Self and negative-Other representation. By 'strategy' it is meant a more or less intentional/institutionalised plan of discourse practices, that is, systematic ways of using language, which serve to achieve particular social, political, psychological or linguistic effects (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 44). Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 71-80) identify a number of pragmatic fallacies which serve in the justification of discrimination. Among the various fallacies they identify I wish to flag up two in particular: *ad verecundiam* and *ad populum*. These two fallacies underpin what van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) refer to as 'authorisation' and 'conformity authorisation' strategies respectively. They justify discrimination on the basis that a particular course of action is right if a certain person or group of persons believes it to be right or if everybody believes it to be right. These strategies are of specific interest, though, for not only do they function to justify discrimination directly in deontic expressions but they also give credence to the validity of implicitly justificatory propositions and thus serve epistemically to legitimise discrimination indirectly (see Hart 2011). These implicitly justificatory propositions are said to belong to *topoi*.

The term *topos* has its roots in classical rhetoric and can be read in one of two ways, either as a 'place' where arguments can be found or as a pragmatic procedure (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 38). It is the latter interpretation that is mainly found in CDA. For example, Wodak defines *topoi* as content-related warrants which connect premises with conclusions (2001: 75). That is, they justify the transition from the premise to the conclusion (ibid.). A key feature of *topoi*, however, is that they are 'common-sense' reasoning schemes typical for specific issues (van Dijk 2000b: 98). The conclusion, therefore, need not be made explicit in the argument but may be presupposed to follow from the premise as a rational inference.<sup>2</sup> They are therefore not presented in discourse in the complete logical form of an argument. Rather, the argument scheme is invoked by the premise and, in turn, facilitates the inferential step toward the presupposed conclusion. Such argument schemes can be expressed as conditional statements (Wodak 2001). To give one example extensively employed in anti-immigration discourse, the *topos* of abuse can be expressed as: "if a right or an offer for help is abused, the right should be changed, or the help should be withdrawn, or measures against the abuse should be taken" (Wodak 2001: 77). This *topos* is apprehended in right-wing discourse calling for more restrictive immigration policy based on claims that immigrants are exploiting asylum laws and/or welfare systems.

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) and Wodak (2001) identify a number of *topoi* which are said to be typical of discourse on immigration. The implicit conclusion in all of these *topoi* seems to be the need for redressive, discriminatory actions restricting the rights and freedoms of immigrants and asylum seekers. A selection of these is presented below (adapted from

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<sup>2</sup> Though seemingly rational, of course, the move may in fact be fallacious.

Wodak 2001: 74). They are each predicated on an Us/Them dichotomy constructed through referential strategies (Reisigl and Wodak 2001).

- Abuse
- Burden
- Disadvantage
- Displacement
- Finance

In drawing on pragma-dialectics, the discourse-historical approach characterises the perlocutionary effects of these argument acts, if achieved, in terms of persuasion, consensus, and the rational resolution of dispute (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 69-71). The audience is explicitly theorised as consciously conceding to the force of the protagonist's argument. For example, Reisigl and Wodak state that "the speaker's and hearer's or reader's ability of rational and logical judgement and conclusion remain the final criteria in the intersubjective achievement of an agreement on a controversial point in question" (p. 70).

In the socio-cognitive approach, which draws much less on pragma-dialectics, Van Dijk prefers to speak of manipulation than persuasion (e.g. 2006). Defining manipulation and distinguishing it from persuasion, however, turns out to be a rather thorny task. Maillat and Oswald (2009) review various possible criteria, including truth, interest, covertness, social conditions, and intent, but suggest that none of these are alone necessary nor together sufficient to account for what constitutes a manipulative act of communication.

From the speaker's point of view, both persuasion and manipulation involve an attempt on the part of speaker to influence the judgements, decisions and actions of the audience (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Van Dijk 2006). However, the distinction is perhaps best captured from the perspective of the addressee (Maillat and Oswald 2009). Here, covertness seems to attain a special status, as Maillat and Oswald acknowledge. Whilst many aspects of communication are covert without being manipulative, and whilst manipulation can still take place even when the audience is alerted to the manipulative nature of the utterance, without making explicit the precise nature of the manipulation, manipulation does intuitively at least seem to be dependent on covertness (Maillat and Oswald 2009: 357). Indeed, as Maillat and Oswald point out, this intuition is borne out by natural language (p. 355). Consider the anomaly in (b) compared to (a):

- (a) Let me persuade you to come to the cinema with me
- (b) Let me manipulate you to come to the cinema with me

The distinction between persuasion and manipulation, then, seems to lie in (i) the extent to which the speech act is explicitly rendered as an argument; and (ii) relatedly, the extent to which the speaker's intention to affect the judgements, decisions and actions of the

audience is made manifest. On such an account, topoi are candidates for manipulative acts of communication since what is actually expressed is a simple assertion rather than an argument. However, I would like to address a further feature of manipulation which has to do with whether the audience reaches a conclusion autonomously through reason or rather more automatically through rules. That is, given information of a certain kind, and in specific conditions, can individuals be induced to judge, decide and behave in predictable ways based on cognitive heuristics and biases? And if they can, do unscrupulous speakers exploit these tendencies for Machiavellian purposes?

This would seem to be the position taken by an emerging school of thought in cognitive and naturalistic approaches to the pragmatics of manipulation (Chilton 2004; de Saussure and Schulz 2005; Hart 2010; Maillat and Oswald 2011).

### **3. Cognitive Heuristics**

There has been much work in the psychology of decision-making which suggests that certain decisions are made on the basis of heuristics (Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Kahneman et al. 1982). Heuristics are ‘rules of thumb’ or cognitive ‘shortcuts’. They are simplification strategies which, on the whole, provide efficient and effective guides to solving specific kinds of problems. As generalisations, however, they are fallible and liable to lead to errors and biases in particular situations. It may be that manipulative communication plays on these biases. Indeed, according Maillat and Oswald (2011: 66), “manipulative communication is foremost about exploiting the inherently fallible and heuristic-based ways in which the human mind processes information”. To give an example, the representativeness heuristic leads to biases in categorising objects on the basis of similarity to some idealised prototype. This heuristic may underpin the success of referential strategies such as explicit dissimulation discussed by Reisigl and Wodak (2001). Similarly, the fallacy of *segundum quid*, which is responsible for the formation of stereotypes, may operate on a heuristic arising from a “universalising instinct” (Rigotti 2005: 72). Emotions too provide heuristics which guide decisions and actions in useful ways (Cosmides and Tooby 2000; Damasio 1994). Like other heuristics, however, these can lead to errors of judgement if misappropriated in certain circumstances (Pinker 1997). And it may be that some discursive strategies are intended to manipulate audiences precisely by stimulating affect (Chilton 2004). In short, then, I am suggesting with Rigotti that “the vices of communication are very often misuses of basically positive human exigencies and tendencies” (Rigotti 2005: 72). Indeed, it seems quite reasonable to me to suggest that many argumentation strategies might succeed as a direct consequence of otherwise helpful cognitive heuristics.

From an evolutionary perspective, heuristics are cognitive adaptations selected for the advantage they brought in ancestral environments.<sup>3</sup> They may be responsible for irrational decisions in some contemporary contexts but in the environment to which they are tuned they proved successful survival strategies.<sup>4</sup> One well researched heuristic in evolutionary psychology is a cheater detection and avoidance mechanism (Cosmides 1989; Cosmides and Tooby 1992). In top-down approaches to evolutionary psychology researchers make testable predictions about the existence of adapted psychological traits based on expectations derived from evolutionary theories (Schmitt 2008: 222). The cheater detection and avoidance mechanism, for example, is predicted by the theory of reciprocal altruism.

Our ancestors lived in relatively stable cooperative coalitions, founded on principles of reciprocity, for the long-term selective advantages that such practice conferred (Trivers 1971). However, any system of social cooperation is susceptible to exploitation by individuals pursuing short-term goals. The evolution of cooperation amongst humans was therefore dependent on a solution to the so-called 'free rider' problem, which consists in individuals who "take the benefits of social cooperation but do not pay the costs" (Barrett et al. 2002: 253).<sup>5</sup> Axelrod (1984) showed that the best way to minimise the risk of exploitation in a system of social cooperation is for individuals to follow a 'tit-for-tat' strategy in series of social exchanges. Tit-for-tat is a general strategy with two rules: cooperate in the first instance and on all subsequent occasions repeat partner's move from previous encounter.<sup>6</sup> This strategy allows for social cooperation to get a foothold in the first place and for it to continue by preventing prolonged exploitation. The realisation of this behavioural strategy, of course, is dependent on underlying cognitive mechanisms. Cosmides (1989) and Cosmides and Tooby (1992) suggest that a cheater detection and avoidance mechanism must have evolved which embodies the rules of tit-for-tat. They use the Wason selection task as evidence for the existence and domain-specific functionality of such a mechanism. In the Wason selection task participants are tasked with testing whether a conditional rule of the underlying form *if P then Q* has been violated. In two conditions, participants are presented with four cards on the face of which are values corresponding with P, ~P, Q and ~Q. On the reverse of P cards are Q values and on the reverse of Q cards are P values. Presented with the problem in a purely logical condition only 25% of participants correctly identify that to test whether or not the rule has been broken one needs to turn over cards corresponding with P and ~Q. Presented in a social contract

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<sup>3</sup> The ancestral environment is not a specific time or place but rather the "statistical composite of selection pressures that caused the design of an adaptation" (Cosmides and Tooby 1997: 12).

<sup>4</sup> A guiding principle of evolutionary psychology is that many features of human cognition can be seen as relics of our ancestral history (Cosmides and Tooby 1997; Pinker 1997).

<sup>5</sup> The free-rider problem is also called the 'collective action' problem in anthropology.

<sup>6</sup> Cooperation in this sense is defined as reciprocated altruistic or collective actions performed for the net benefits that such an arrangement brings.

scenario, however, 75% of participants successfully solve the problem. Cosmides and Tooby claim that this differential is a function of a context-sensitive mechanism adapted to manage the social contracts on which cooperative living relies.

If social contracts are found to have been infringed, the mechanism is adapted to promote decisions concerning future cooperation which reflect the second rule in tit-for-tat, namely withdraw from further cooperative engagements with guilty individuals. The mechanism for managing social contracts, then, must include at least (i) a heuristic that can detect cheaters (defined as those reneging on a social contract) and (ii) a heuristic that causes one to punish cheaters by no longer acting altruistically toward them (Cosmides and Tooby 1992: 177).

The argument I wish to make is that some of the argument acts found in anti-immigration discourse may achieve their intended perlocutionary effects by exploiting these heuristics. That is, certain argument acts such as those belonging to the topoi listed in Section 2 may succeed in yielding decisions in favour of discrimination as a consequence of an adapted cheater detection and avoidance mechanism. Note that this is not a reductionist argument. We are not pre-determined to form discriminatory attitudes and there is nothing inevitable about social exclusion. The cheater detection and avoidance mechanism operates only on specific input conditions. What I am suggesting is that in the modern world those conditions are met (spuriously) through discourse where many of the argument acts typical of discourse on immigration can be shown to provide precisely, either directly or via inter-/co-textual interaction, the necessary antecedents for the operation of an extant, evolved mechanism for cheater detection and avoidance (see Section 4). In other words, discriminatory attitudes arise when argumentation harnesses adapted cognition for manipulative purposes. Laland and Brown make the same point in relation to war as follows:

Biological predispositions ... do not cause war. However, [they] do play an important role as they are exploited, for instance in the propaganda of mobilizing and abusive leaders, in ways ... that sanctify aggression against adversaries. (2002: 97)

There is a further important sense in which the argument I am making is not deterministic. I do not wish to suggest that, given an input of a certain kind, hearers cannot help but in all circumstances to form discriminatory attitudes. For example, the audience is free to dismiss the antecedent proposition in the topos as untrue (Chilton 2005). And even when the proposition is treated as true, alternative arguments can be called up which would prohibit the output of the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism.<sup>7</sup> However, there are several reasons to think that for some hearers on some occasions the argument acts in anti-immigration discourse may automatically yield decisions in favour of discrimination. These are outlined in the following. (1) Given the significance of the free-rider problem in the

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<sup>7</sup> I am here retaining the domain-specific functionality of the mechanism but doing away with the criteria of information encapsulation usually associated with the modularity of mind hypothesis (e.g. Fodor 1983).



ancestral environment, the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism, like many other adapted mechanisms, may have evolved to operate on a fast and frugal basis and be biased toward false-positive errors (Haselton 2007; Haselton and Buss 2003). (2) Although the argument act may be truth-conditionally infelicitous, it may nevertheless receive uptake if it is judged as felicitous by hearers. And speakers have at their disposal a further range of argumentation strategies designed specifically to provide epistemic support to their testimonies, which themselves may exploit further evolved cognitive biases (Hart 2011). (3) People are biased toward believing propositions which confirm existing beliefs (the confirmation bias) (Oswald and Grosjean 2004). (4) A proposition gains in perceived truth-status as a consequence of the frequency with which it is repeated (the validity effect) (Hackett Renner 2004). (5) Information which may block the output of the cheater avoidance heuristic may not be available to the audience, either because (a) it is not part of their existing belief system and is not presented in the discourse or because (b) cognitive access to it is somehow hindered (Maillat and Oswald 2011).

(3), (4) and (5a) relate to macro-level discourse strategies. For example, the confirmation bias and validity effect mean that the systematic exclusion of certain information and the frequent inclusion of other information within an order of discourse can lead to the content of that discourse becoming a self-fulfilling truth simply by virtue of itself. The more frequently a proposition is encountered, according to the validity effect, the higher the truth-value it attains and the higher the truth-value a proposition has, according to the confirmation bias, the more likely it and other consonant claims are to go unchallenged on subsequent occasions of use. These two biases may therefore account for the process of “naturalisation” often discussed but which remains under-theorised in CDA (e.g. Fairclough 1989).

(2) and (5b) relate to micro-level discourse strategies. For example, in relation to (2) Hart (2011) discusses the role of evidentiality in legitimising assertions. He suggests that speakers can use evidentials rhetorically in discourse to increase the credibility of their propositional claims. In relation to (5b), Maillat and Oswald (2011) propose a context-selection constraint as an integral facet of manipulative communication. The essence of their argument, based in Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), is that manipulative speakers are able to take advantage of a “resource-bound efficiency constraint balancing cognitive effort and contextual effects” (p. 69) to frame their discourse in such a way as to make certain assumptions salient to the point that any conflicting assumptions do not satisfy effort-effect relations and so remain inaccessible to hearers, at least at the moment of utterance. Manipulative discourse for Maillat and Oswald, then, involves two dimensions:

on the one hand, it induces the hearer into processing the information in a very constrained context of interpretation, and, on the other hand, it simultaneously makes sure that the hearer is prevented from expanding the latter, so that further

assumptions (e.g. about the utterance's tentative incompatibility with previously held beliefs, or about the speaker's motivations) are not accessed at all. (p. 71)

In terms of decision-making, this process is manipulative in so far as it exploits an availability bias according to which we make decisions based on currently salient information rather than taking into account other potentially applicable background assumptions (Reber 2004).

All of this, anyway, points to the ability of speakers to create discursive contexts in which particular propositions can, by virtue of the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism, manipulate audiences into programmatically forming anti-immigration attitudes. In the next section, I show that a number of the argument acts recurrent in anti-immigration discourse pertain to the violation of a tacit "citizen's contract" and are therefore strong candidates for manipulative acts of communication.

#### 4. Legitimation in Light of Cognitive Heuristics

The various propositions associated with the topoi listed in Section 2 predicate that immigrants and asylum seekers are in violation of some tacit social contract of the following underlying form: if individuals have access to in-group resources then they should contribute in some equitable way to the effectiveness of the in-group. It is specifically instantiated as: if individuals have access to state resources then they should contribute economically to the nation. If taken as true, then, and in the right (restricted) discursive contexts, these propositions may provide the necessary antecedents to activate the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism and thereby lead audiences, without proper scrutiny, to decisions in favour of discriminatory actions. Propositions providing input to the cheater avoidance heuristic, of course, need not be expressed explicitly in discourse but may be implied or presupposed. In this section, I use attested examples taken from a corpus of media discourse on immigration to highlight candidate assertions for such acts of manipulation.<sup>8</sup>

The topoi of burden, finance and displacement all predicate that immigrants and asylum seekers draw on state resources. Within the topos of burden, for example, they are presented in general terms not just as drawing on state resources but as constituting a 'drain' on those resources. Consider (1):

(1) *The Sun*, 24 Oct. 2003

Government insiders say Cabinet chiefs are determined to reduce **the drain on the nation's resources from illegal immigration**.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples are taken from a specific corpus of UK media discourse compiled from articles on immigration and asylum published across 8 national newspapers between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2006.

Also within this topos, as in (2), immigrants and asylum seekers may be presented specifically as a burden on employment, housing and health services.

(2) *The Sun*, 17 Jan. 2003

Britain needs to rid itself of these people and in the process end the terrorism threat and **the drain on our jobs, housing, hospitals ...**

As formulated by Wodak, the topos of burden takes the following structure: “if a person, an institution or a country is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens” (2001: 76).

The topos of finance can be viewed as a specific instantiation of the topos of burden. Within this topos, immigration and asylum is reported in monetary terms as presenting some particular cost and as therefore constituting a financial burden to the in-group and in-group members. Consider (3):

(3) *Daily Mail*, 28 Jan. 2005

**The cost of uncontrolled immigration into Britain has rocketed to £3billion**, the equivalent of £140 a year for every household, Michael Howard will warn today. The Tory leader will intensify his drive to put the issue at the centre of the General Election campaign by highlighting **the financial burden on the taxpayer**.

The topos of finance is characterised by Wodak as: “if a specific situation or action costs too much money or causes a loss of revenue, one should perform actions which diminish the costs or help to avoid the loss” (2001: 76).

Within the topos of displacement, as exemplified in (4) and (5), immigrants and asylum seekers are predicated as having privileged access to socio-economic resources ahead of the in-group:

(4) *Daily Mail*, 10 July 2000

Because of the ‘postcode lottery’ this means that asylum seekers almost 80 per cent of whose applications to stay are eventually rejected **could find themselves ahead of Britons in the queue for scarce NHS resources**.

(5) *The Times*, 27 Jan. 2004

Destitute and disable asylum-seekers **can jump ahead of Britons in the housing queue** after the Law Lords dismissed an application by Lambeth Council, south London, to challenge an Appeal Court ruling that it was obliged to house a disabled Algerian asylum-seeker.

The topos of displacement is not discussed by Wodak, although it may be related to the topos of justice (Wodak 2001: 75). It can be expressed as: if a situation leads to certain individuals being privileged over other individuals, action should be taken to redress this imbalance.

The topos of disadvantage (or uselessness) is the reflex of the topos of advantage (or usefulness) which is captured by Wodak (2001: 74) as: “if an action or decision is useful or bears advantages, then one should perform it”. The topos of disadvantage, conversely, can be expressed as: if an action or decision is not useful or does not bring about advantages, then one should not perform it. Of course, this topos, as appropriated in anti-immigration discourse, typically relies on the perspective *pro bono nobis* (for the good of Us). In the topos of disadvantage, then, it is predicated that immigrants and asylum seekers bring no economic benefit or make no worthwhile contribution to the in-group. Consider (6) and (7):

(6) *The Express*, 13 Sept. 2002

The majority of asylum-seekers **are unlikely ever to contribute to the economy.**

(7) *Sunday Times*, 8 Feb. 2004

[T]hey also **add to the pool of unskilled workers**, something which **Britain does not need.**

On the standard account of argumentation offered in CDA, predications in anti-immigration discourse are analysed as realisations of the antecedents in these conditional argumentation schemes, which, in turn, function as content-warrants justifying the pragmatic move to the presupposed conclusion in the consequent.

However, the antecedents in the topoi of burden, finance and displacement on the one hand, and the topos of disadvantage on the other, relate to two sides of the “citizen’s social contract”, which, they predicate, immigrants and asylum seekers are in breach of. On the alternative account presented here, it is therefore suggested that (i) assertions realising the antecedents in these particular topoi function inter- or co-textually to activate the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism; and that (ii) the conclusions in these topoi, as guides for action, operationalise the second rule in tit for tat and may thus be analysed as outputs of the cheater-detection and avoidance mechanism. On this account, then, certain topoi, as formulated in CDA, may in fact reflect adapted decision rules on the basis of which hearers reach conclusions in heuristic rather than reasoned ways.

One topos which may alone provide the input conditions necessary for the operation of the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism is the topos of abuse briefly discussed in Section 2. The topos of abuse entails both the topos of burden and the topos of disadvantage (uselessness). Assertions realising the antecedent in this topos directly represent immigrants and asylum seekers as social cheats (as defined above). This is

achieved via predication in verb phrases as well as in noun phrases, including metaphorical noun phrases. Consider (8) as a general example:

(8) *The Sun*, 23 March 2000

These people will contribute nothing towards our economy and the Scottish people will find it hard to tolerate a community which **takes everything and gives nothing**.

More specifically, it is sometimes predicated that immigrants and asylum seekers abuse social security systems as in (9) and (10):

(9) *The Sun*, 29 Oct. 2003

They **will exploit our generous welfare system for every penny they can**.

(10) *Daily Mail*, 7 March 2000

[S]ome supposed asylum seekers **repay our generosity by cheating the benefit system**.

The antecedent in the topos of abuse is also realised in metaphorical noun phrases, which can serve both a referential and a predication function simultaneously (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). For example, biologynyms like those in (11) refer to immigrants and asylum seekers as parasitic rather than mutually symbiotic organisms:

(11) *The Sun*, 24 July 2003

How is it that **this asylum sponger**, who had the audacity to rent out his free house, also receives a weekly giro of £176 when old age couples, who have paid their dues all their working lives, only receive £150 between them? [...] This must be stopped now before our country is sucked dry by **these parasites**.

Assertions realising the antecedent in the topos of abuse, then, are themselves, without textual interaction, candidates for mobilising the cheater-detection and avoidance mechanism in manipulative acts of communication.

Of course, as we have mentioned in Section 3 and as has been discussed at length elsewhere (e.g. Chilton 2005; Hart 2011), hearers can only be manipulated in this way if they accept the manipulating assertion as true. And, as Chilton (2004: 21) points out, “humans do not, or do not have to process incoming messages as already true”. However, there is at least a presumption of cooperation and truth in human linguistic communication (Grice 1975, 1978). Communication could not have evolved otherwise. Communication, like any other system of cooperation, is thus vulnerable to exploitation, which here takes the form of deception, misdirection, exaggeration etc. In order to sustain the benefits of communication, therefore, some mechanisms must have co-evolved which allow hearers to monitor incoming messages and filter them according to an assigned truth status. Sperber

(2006) and Sperber et al. (2010) therefore propose a suite of mechanisms for “epistemic vigilance” which perform precisely this function. Of course, these mechanisms cannot be too overzealous otherwise individuals would lose the significant benefits brought by communication. And, crucially, speakers are able to take advantage of their own safeguards in order to satisfy the safeguards of others (Sperber 2006; Sperber 2010). The system therefore still leaves room for audiences to be manipulated by unscrupulous speakers. Indeed, according to Sperber (2006: 178), “cognitive manipulation of others is one of the effects that makes the practices of testimony and argumentation adaptive”. Hart (2011) analyses expressions of evidentiality in particular as designed to meet the conditions of acceptance demanded by epistemic vigilance. Producers of media discourse, on this account, are required to offer reasons why audiences should accept their testimonies if they wish to achieve intended perlocutionary effects. One reason to accept an assertion and adapt one’s belief system accordingly is that it appears to be true. And speakers can use arguments from perception, proof and obviousness to provide evidence to this effect (Hart 2011). However, there may be other reasons to retain a proposition as part of one’s belief system irrespective of truth. For example, when a child believes their parents’ claims that all strangers are dangerous. Two kinds of evidential are especially relevant in this regard. Consider the following examples:

(12) *The Express*, 23 Feb. 2005

Under Labour, Britain has become a soft touch on asylum and immigration and **everybody knows it**. [quoting shadow Home Secretary, David Davis]

(13) *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 Jan. 2003

**Everyone can see that** the asylum system, whatever the merits of the principle behind it, is not working.

(14) *Sunday Times*, 20 July 2003

**Migrationwatch UK, a specialist think tank, says that** in the next 20 years one new house will have to be built for every four already existing in London, the southeast and southwest of England.

(15) *The Guardian*, 6 Aug. 2004

The government policy of dispersing asylum seekers away from London and the south-east may increase HIV transmission, **medical experts warned** last night.

The rhetorical function of such source-tags is usually explained in CDA in terms of appeal to fallacious argument schemes. For example, (12) and (13) represent conformity authorisation strategies based on the fallacy of *ad populum* whilst (14) and (15) represent authorisation strategies based on the fallacy of *ad verecundiam* (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999). But this begs the question, of course, what makes these fallacies effective in the first

place? The answer, I wish to suggest, is that whilst it may be epistemologically fallacious to entertain a proposition simply because it is believed by others, to do so may have been a sensible strategy for our ancestors which has given rise to a modern conformity bias (Henrich and Boyd 1998). As Sperber et al. (2010: 380) put it:

If an idea is generally accepted by the people you interact with, isn't this a good reason to accept it too? It may be a modest and prudent policy to go along with the people one interacts with, and to accept the ideas they accept. Anything else may compromise one's cultural competence and social acceptability.

The argument from *ad populum*, then, may succeed in achieving belief-fixation, paving the way for further manipulative effects, by virtue of an inherent bias toward the conformity of background assumptions. Arguments from *ad verecundium* may ultimately succeed on the back of the same biases. For example, assertions from experts tend to achieve salience within society and find themselves repeated over and over again. Given the validity effect (see Section 3), then, assertions accompanied by arguments from *ad verecundium* can be expected to receive uptake within the target community whence the conformity bias underpinning arguments from *ad populum* comes into effect.

## 5. Conclusion

What I have tried to do in this paper is offer an explanation, from an evolutionary perspective, for the cognitive import of specific argument acts presented in anti-immigration discourse. This explanation relies on a 'mapping' between discursive strategies on the one hand and cognitive heuristics and biases on the other. In line with Maillat and Oswald (2009: 360), then, my claim is that "manipulation exploits the way our mechanisms of information processing work; that is, a necessarily imperfect and biased way". On this account, the logically invalid conclusions of particular topoi and other fallacious arguments can be reinterpreted as errors and biases which result from cognitive heuristics and other natural tendencies and which are mobilised in contexts beyond their proper domain for purposes of manipulation. In particular, I have tried to show how the cheater detection and avoidance mechanism as well as systems for epistemic vigilance are exploited in media discourse on immigration.

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